

The Strongman Bond: Trump and Erdogan

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A Trump administration will likely see a warming of relations between the USA, Turkey, and Russia. With regards to Turkey, Trump has praised Erdogan, stating in an [interview](#) with the *New York Times*, that the suppression of the coup on July 15th was ‘quite impressive from the standpoint of existing government.’

Trump went on to say that he would ignore Erdogan’s restrictions on civil liberties and would not ‘get involved.’ Senior advisors have also come out in support of closer US-Turkey ties. Lieutenant General Michael Flynn, Trump’s new National Security Adviser, has [urged](#) the extradition of alleged coup-organiser Fetullah Gulen, which, if successful, would represent a large victory for the Erdogan administration.

Flynn has also [written](#) on the importance of Turkey for regional stability: ‘We must begin with understanding that Turkey is vital to US interests. Turkey is really our strongest ally against the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS).’^[5] As such, a Trump administration will likely support Erdogan’s domestic policy and Turkey’s planned nuclear programme would be unchanged or encouraged. While the tender processes for Akkuyu NPP and Sinop NPP are completed, the tender for Turkey’s third NPP, in İğneada, remains open and is to close in 2017. The [companies interested](#) in building İğneada include the US company Westinghouse and Chinese and Japanese consortiums. With stronger US-Turkey ties, the new Republican administration could influence the tender decision in favour of the US-based firm. US-Russian relations could also warm under Trump. Given that the state-owned company [Rosatom](#) has a controlling 51% stake in the Akkuyu Nuclear Power Plant (NPP), a close relationship between Trump and Putin could result in US support for greater Russian influence in Turkey and stronger nuclear links between Rosatom and Turkey.

The status of the 50 American nuclear warheads at Incirlik NATO air base also remains in question. A weakening or complete disintegration of NATO could result in the

removal of the nuclear warheads from Turkey; however, it seems probable that NATO will survive. Although Trump has indeed [stated](#) that the US commitment to NATO would be dependent on the other 27 nations meeting the 2% of GDP target, it is unlikely that such campaign claims will be realised in the face of [congressional and military opposition](#). Similarly, Trump has shown signs of a more positive attitude towards NATO; he supported the Warsaw Summit's plan for a Joint Intelligence and Security Division to tackle terrorism, [describing it](#) as a 'great' development. As such, nuclear warheads will probably remain at Incirlik for the duration of the Trump administration provided Turkey's membership of NATO is continued.